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AUTHOR Han, Gyuseog; Lindskold, Svenn
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ABSTRACT

Interest in the ways in which conflict can be de-escalated led to this study, in which 96 college students served as subjects, to compare the effectiveness of tit for tat strategies with Osgood's (1962) proposal of graduated and reciprocated initiatives in tension reduction. The first requirement of Osgood's proposal is to communicate the need for interdependence, the mutual damage of distrust, and the need for one party to break out of the established pattern. Then a series of conciliatory initiatives is precisely announced and carried out so as to build trust. Measured retaliation to exploitation is counseled to make clear the firmness of the initiator's intentions. Results indicated that this strategy was successful in producing cooperation because it involves taking the initiative for conciliation. In the games that the participants played to assess the value of the two strategies (tit for tat versus Osgood's proposal), the resolve of the strategists using Osgood's method to repeatedly demonstrate the willingness to turn the cycle around through openly announced action is the essential element. When parties have lingered in escalation, the norm of reciprocity must be cultivated anew and this strategy, unlike the tit for tat strategy, does that. (IS)

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Responsiveness and Conciliation in Conflict

Gyuseog Han & Svenn Lindskold

Ohio University

Presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, May, 1985: Chicago

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Introduction

The norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the principle of social exchange (Blau, 1964; Gergen, Greenberg, & Willis, 1980; Homans, 1974) frequently govern social interaction. Accordingly, giving aid and cooperation activates an obligation to reciprocate. Inequity in inputs or outcomes produces distress (Berkowitz & Walster, 1976; Lerner, 1974; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973) and is prejudicial to the future of the relationship.

Gouldner (1960) discussed the "starting mechanism" feature of the norm of reciprocity. That is, the requirement to adhere to the reciprocity principle makes it possible for new social relationships to be formed because one party can propose lending resources and energy to a joint effort with considerable assurance that they will be reciprocated by the potential future partner.

A conflict relationship is typically defined as the condition in which parties mutually perceive they have incompatible objectives (Deutsch, 1973; Kriesberg, 1982). The satisfaction of the wants of one appears to require a loss by the other. Under such circumstances an exchange of benefits appears unlikely; only mutual

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damage seems possible. The reciprocation of harm creates a spiral of escalation which hardens the conflict.

Consequently, deescalation of an intense conflict requires benevolent reciprocity in a relationship in which such benevolence has become highly improbable. The distrust that has been engendered discourages risking a new start, making the reversal of the spiral of escalation difficult unless something dramatic is done to brake the spiral and turn it around.

Osgood's (1962; 1979) proposal of Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-reduction (GRIT) is designed to do that. The first requirement of GRIT is to communicate a conciliatory cognitive framework stressing interdependence, the mutual damage of distrust, and the need for one party to break out of the established pattern. Then a series of conciliatory initiatives is precisely announced and carried out so as to build trust. Measured retaliation to exploitation is counseled to make clear the firmness of the initiator's intentions.

There is considerable laboratory support for the GRIT proposal (Lindskold, 1978; Lindskold & Aronoff, 1980; Lindskold & Collins, 1978; Lindskold, Walters, &

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Koutsourais, 1983). It has also been shown, however, that the tit-for-tat (TFT) strategy of matching the opponent's cooperation and competition, with a one-trial lag, is more profitable than other strategies in terms of maximizing outcomes through inducing the opponent in a Prisoner's Dilemma (PD) to cooperate (Axelrod, 1984; Oskamp, 1971). It has been described as fair and firm (Chertkoff & Esser, 1976) and clearly partakes of the reciprocity principle. Pruitt (1981, p. 117) has argued that the GRIT studies may in fact be studies of TFT, with the addition of communication. Laboratory studies of TFT have not included verbal announcements of intention. The question is a fair one, demanding an empirical answer. However, because GRIT involves an important element that makes it different from TFT, viz., the repeated taking of a cooperative initiative, it is hypothesized that GRIT will evoke more cooperation than TFT, even with a verbal announcement of the intention to match. Thus the present study was conducted in whch GRIT and TFT were compared, with or without verbal communication.

Because the GRIT statement also entails a statement concerning recognition of mutual interests and the long term need to cooperate, a fifth

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experimental condition was added in which the general statement of the intention to follow the TFT principle was supplemented by the identical phrase from the general announcement of GRIT concerning mutual interest. In this manner the test most fair to TFT in its comparison with GRIT could be made. Prior research has shown that GRIT-like statements of the intention to cooperate are relatively ineffective if they lack the statement of mutual interest (Lindskold, Bennett, & Wayner, 1976; Lindskold & Finch, 1981).

Method

Subjects

A total of 86 college students, half female and half male, were randomly assigned to the five conditions of the design with nine in the communication conditions and eight in the no-communication conditions.

Apparatus and Procedure

Subjects played 40 trials of a modified PD game (see Lindskold & Finch, 1981, for details) against a simulated other subject. The first 10 trials served as familiarization as well as to stimulate conflict as the

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product of unpatterned 50% competition by the other.

During the second and third 10-trial blocks, either a TFT or a GRIT pattern of choices was followed by the other. In the TFT conditions, the latter made the same choice on trial 11 as the subject had made on trial 10 and, then, for the next 19 trials followed the same, TFT with one-trial lag, approach. In the GRIT conditions, the other always made Choice 1 on trial 11. Thereafter, if the subject had cooperated on the preceding trial, the simulated other cooperated. If the subject had made Choice 2, the other made Choice 2; however, the crucial distinction from TFT was that the other never made two Choice 2's in a row. That is, once the latter made a Choice 2, she or he was programmed to make a Choice 1 on the following trial, irrespective of what the subject had chosen on the preceding trial.

The last phase of the experiment was a block of 10 Choice 1's by the other, which was included to observe any delayed effects of the manipulated strategies. There was no communication in this last block.

Manipulation of communication. The effect of communication of general and specific intentions was of primary interest in the present study. In the three

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communication conditions, the other sent a general note on the first communication opportunity; and, thereafter, truthfully communicated each PD choice in advance for the duration of the 20 trials of phase two of the experiment.

When the first communication signal was given (after trial 10), the simulated other in the three communication conditions pressed the button to send the third message: "I wish to write a note." The note, written on scratch paper and delivered to the subject, read: "I'll do what you do, 1 for 1, or 2 for 2" in the TFT condition; "I'll be making Choice 1's, it's what we have to do to get our most points" in the GRIT condition; or "I'll make Choice 1 if you do, or 2 if you make 2--we have to make Choice 1's to get our most points" in the TFT/mutual-interest condition. Then, prior to each of the next 20 trials, the other pressed the button to send a truthful message posted on the panel: "I will make Choice 1 on the next trial" or "I will make Choice 2 on the next trial," dictated by each strategy as described above.

In the TFT and GRIT without communication conditions, there were no messages posted on the panel and no opportunity provided for verbal communication.

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Post-experimental questionnaire. After the 40th PD trial, the experimenter delivered an "Interpersonal Impressions" form on which the subjects rated the "other subject" on 19 seven-point semantic differential items. Each subject was then fully debriefed.

Results

Strategy Effects

The frequency of cooperative PD choices by the subjects in blocks of ten trials is shown in Table 1. Blocks two and three are of primary interest, being the ones in which the manipulated strategies were in effect.

Insert Table 1 about here

Several *a priori* *t* -tests supported the hypothesis that the response to the GRIT strategy with communication would be more cooperative than the response to all others. Out of 20 trials in blocks 2 and 3, mean cooperation frequency was 14.72 in the communicated GRIT condition which was significantly greater than all others (which did not differ from one another), the *t* ratios were within the range of 2.11

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and 2.46.

There was a significant interaction effect of Blocks and Strategies, $F(12, 243) = 2.41$, $p < .01$, with a significant change from Block 1 to Block 2 only in the GRIT with communication condition (by Cicchetti's [1972] test at .05 level; critical difference = 2.50 for the within group comparison).

Delayed Effect of Strategies

There was no statistically significant change in frequency of cooperation from block 3 to block 4 in any of the conditions, taken one at a time (a change of 2.48 was required to be significant). Table 1, however, shows cooperation frequency in block 4 to be uniformly high in the three communication conditions, compared to the two no-communication conditions, $F(1, 84) = 9.90$, $p < .01$.

Post-Experimental Impressions

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the items on the post-experimental questionnaire revealed a significant main effect of communication among the four orthogonal experimental conditions, $F(11, 50) = 2.03$, $p < .05$. Subsequent univariate analysis showed that the strategists employing

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communication were rated evaluatively more positive, more trustworthy, more predictable, more credible, more fair, and more cooperative than the strategists performing the same choices, but without communication.

A significant effect of condition was revealed in a MANOVA across the three communication conditions, $F(22, 76) = 1.71$, $p < .05$. The subsequent univariate analyses, followed by Tukey's HSD test, showed the GRIT strategist was perceived as more cooperative than either of the TFT strategists, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The GRIT strategy is successful in producing cooperation not because it is responsive to the other person, not because it involves communication, and not because it involves raising the issue of mutual interest. All of these are important, but the key remaining distinction is that GRIT involves resolutely taking the initiative--repeatedly returning to conciliation even after some retaliation is required in response to exploitation by the target party.

The frequently adopted tactic of stating willingness to cooperate or negotiate, provided the other first demonstrates such willingness, makes sense

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in a social system in which reciprocity is a universal principle (Gouldner, 1960). But, in a conflict situation, once exploitation and suspicion have occurred, the reciprocity principle is not a sufficient basis for deescalation. In fact, reciprocity has prevailed in the relationship, but in a cycle of threat and punishment. The resolve of the GRIT strategist in repeatedly demonstrating the willingness to turn that cycle around through openly announced action is the essential element. The starting mechanism aspect of the norm of reciprocity needs to be cultivated anew when parties have lingered in escalation. The failure of the TFT/mutual-interest communication to induce cooperation comparable to that of the GRIT condition is, indeed, informative in this sense.

The comparatively high level of cooperation in block 4 in <u>all three</u> communication conditions was unexpected and seems to suggest a corollary benefit of being a truthful communicator. Lindskold and Finch (1981) reported a related effect. A record of truth and reliability, as indicated by the post-experimental results regarding impressions of trustworthiness, credibility, predictability, fairness, etc., may have made the unannounced cooperation appear as a reliable

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new pattern--unannounced but likely to be followed. The GRIT strategy is designed to communicate and carry out an intended change in the interaction. Apparently, 20 trials of truthful announcements of choices achieve much the same effect. Advocates of the GRIT strategy would likely take the position, however, that trust is cultivated not only by truthfulness, but also by benevolence and by demonstrating that manipulation is not the objective (Lindskold, 1978). This is more clearly demonstrated in the fully elaborated GRIT strategy than in any pledge merely to match the target.

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Table 1.

Mean Frequency of Cooperation in Each Condition in Blocks of Ten Trials

Condition	Block 1	2	3	4
With communication				
GRIT	4.50	8.00	6.72	6.22
TFT	4.56	5.44	4.50	6.83
TFT/Mutual-interest	5.17	5.56	5.06	6.39
Without communication				
GRIT	4.25	4.81	5.50	4.31
TFT	4.38	4.94	4.94	4.00

Note. The strategy manipulations were in effect in blocks 2 and 3. The primary test of the manipulations, see text, was of the frequency of cooperation during those 20 trials.

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